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QUESTION OF PALESTINE

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Letter dated 8 October 1992 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to draw your urgent attention to the ongoing hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners to protest against ill-treatment and the deterioration of their conditions of detention.

According to a press release by the Palestine Human Rights Information Centre of 10 October 1992, as well as reports in The New York Times of 3 October and The Times (London) of 7 October, at least 3,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli central prisons - Jneid, Nablus, Ashkelon, Bir Saba' and Nafha - are continuing an open hunger strike, which began on 27 September.

It was reported that the prisoners began the strike after having exhausted all other measures of negotiations without success. They are demanding an end to the policy of long periods of solitary confinement and other arbitrary individual and collective punishments; the closure of special underground punishment sections where dungeon conditions prevail; a reinstatement of adequate food rations; a halt to overcrowding; access to proper medical treatment; and an end to beatings and tear-gassing in the cells and to demeaning strip searches.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in its annual reports to the General Assembly, as well as through the Chairman's letters, has repeatedly drawn attention to the inhuman conditions of detention of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including beatings and torture during interrogation, in violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and international human rights

standards. The Committee is seriously concerned at the reported increase during the past year in the harsh and repressive treatment of prisoners, and the further deterioration in their conditions of detention, including reductions in food rations, denial of family visits and the growing use of solitary confinement.

The Committee further wishes to draw attention to the fact that, according to the above-mentioned press release, an estimated 12,500 Palestinians are currently being held in Israeli detention centres and prisons, most of them operated by the army and military police. Up to 1,000 more may be held under short detention orders and not registered in detention centres or police lock-ups.

The Committee deplores that the Israeli authorities have so far refused to address the legitimate grievances of the prisoners, treating them as a security problem, rather than as a human rights issue. The Committee is gravely concerned that support demonstrations have been suppressed with live ammunition and rubber bullets, resulting in at least 90 Palestinians being shot and injured in the Gaza Strip, as reported by The New York Times on 8 October.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I once again appeal to you as well as to all those concerned, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention, to take all the necessary measures to ensure that Israel desist forthwith from using illegal methods in treating the Palestinian detainees and respect its international obligations under the Convention and relevant human rights instruments, as well as Security Council resolutions.

I would appreciate it if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 30, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kéba Birane CISSE
Chairman
Committee on the Exercise
of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People